

**Testimony in Support of Raised Bill #6305**  
**“An Act Concerning Implementation of the Sustinet Plan.”**

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Members of the Public Health, Insurance and Human Services Committees: Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony in support of Raised Bill #6305, “An Act Concerning Implementation of the Sustinet Plan.” I am the Rev. Josh Pawelek, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester and president of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Coalition for Equity and Justice. As a member of the Steering Committee of Connecticut’s Interfaith Fellowship for Universal Healthcare, I offer my testimony in solidarity with more than 700 clergy across the state who’ve been working tirelessly these past five years to transform our health care system so that all residents have access to quality, affordable health care. While there are many issues that divide the faith community, on the issue of fixing our broken healthcare system, we are united by a common moral conviction that health care is a human right and that government bears some responsibility for ensuring that right.

We clergy see the brokenness in our health care system first hand. We see parishioners delaying treatment for serious illness. We see parishioners resorting to expensive emergency room care because they lacked coverage for earlier, preventive care. We see parishioners making the hard choices between procuring necessary medications and feeding their families or paying utility bills. Recently I’ve been providing pastoral care to a sister and brother whose mother—a small business owner in Manchester—could not afford health insurance. She died of lung cancer in December facing more than \$200,000 in medical debt. She was 60 years old. The house she had hoped to bequeath to her children must be sold to pay these medical bills. Every family that lives without access to affordable, quality health care is a tragedy waiting to happen, a dream waiting to be denied, a hope waiting to be dashed. While we clergy were overjoyed at the passage of the federal Affordable Care Act last March, we understand there is still much to do to ensure that Connecticut benefits to the greatest extent possible from federal reform. We believe we can still do better in Connecticut. We believe we can do better with Sustinet.

Critics argue we need to keep government out of health care. I understand this argument. But as one who receives health insurance as the spouse of a municipal employee, and as one who has had to use that health insurance to address the medical and surgical needs of a child born with a complex congenital heart defect, I know for a fact that local governments in Connecticut—as well as state government—can and do provide their employees and their families with some of the best health insurance available in the world today. Don’t believe the critics’ hype. Government can provide world class health coverage. In our state, at least for public employees, it already does—and it should be commended. Sustinet will build on the state government’s excellent record at providing health coverage.

Critics argue that Sustinet will cost too much. We don’t agree. By expanding the current state-insured pool to approximately 770,000 people in its initial stages (including state employees, retirees and their families, and participants in HUSKY, Medicaid and SAGA), Sustinet will have unprecedented scale and leverage to bring health care costs down. As a health insurance program participating in Connecticut’s federally mandated health care exchange,

Sustinet will ensure robust and honest competition that motivates private insurers to seek efficiencies and reduce costs for their customers. Everybody wins, including Connecticut, which will—even by conservative estimates—save \$225 million a year by 2014.

One of the more painful realizations for me over the past few years is the extent of the disparity in health care access and outcomes between people of color and white people. The growing medical literature on these disparities describes a stark race-based contrast. Personal stories of people of color negatively impacted speak to subtle and not-so-subtle racism within the health care industry. The data and the stories are heartbreaking. Sustinet takes these disparities seriously by devoting resources to enrolling the most hard-to-reach populations; enhancing cultural competency within the health care system; and establishing standards of care based on racial and ethnic identities. We won't achieve our health care vision if we don't address racial disparities. We commend the Sustinet Board for the attention it has paid to this pernicious and perplexing dynamic.

We are confronted with a moral imperative: Making excellent health care accessible and affordable for Connecticut residents. Let us not turn back from what we've started. Let us rise together to meet this challenge. Let us do what is morally right. Let us do what is fiscally sound. Let us do what is socially and economically just. Let us do what is spiritually wise. Please support an Act Concerning Implementation of the Sustinet Plan." Thank you.